



WARREN SONBERT

Warren Sonbert's films are an exhilarating experience — on one level a joyride; in other ways an intense and sometimes painful examination of world turmoil and doubt. Sonbert's something of an image junkie: He travels extensively, collecting and later cataloging his specimens before assembling a selected few into a collage of sight and (in his two most recent films, *Short Fuse* and *Friendly Witness*) sound. Where *Friendly Witness* (1989) is more the joyride, the brand-new *Short Fuse* explores the relationship between pleasure and pain that is a normal part of life. In one particularly intense sequence, repeated shots of Loma Prieta earthquake damage and a woman's breast being injected with an anonymous needle are juxtaposed with images of people dancing and, later, with a glorious mountain scene. These images last just a few seconds on screen, but it's surprising how swiftly we can make connections between them (and with the music), and how lasting an impact they have on us.

— Kurt Wolff

Short Fuse and *Friendly Witness*. Warren Sonbert in person. Mon./20 at 7 and 9:30 pm, Roxie Cinema, 3117 16th St., SF. \$5. 863-1087.

Experimental 'Fuse' Screens Today at Roxie

By Edward Guthmann
Chronicle Staff Critic

In "Friendly Witness" (1989), local film maker Warren Sonbert went out on a limb with his first sound film in 20 years. Using rock tunes from the '60s in its first half, and classical music in its second, "Witness" borrowed some of the conventions from MTV-style videos, and turned them inside out.

It was a welcome move, and one that Sonbert, 44, a veteran experimental film maker and part-time film critic for the Bay Area Reporter, develops further in "Short Fuse," a 37-minute short that plays tonight only at the Roxie Cinema.

Assembled from two decades of Sonbert outtakes, and shot all over the world with his 16mm Bolex camera, "Fuse" is a crazy-quilt of disparate images. Boogie boarders, trapeze artists, lava beds, snoozing cats and an all-male clogging group share screen time, arranged in a cinematic mosaic that's occasionally soothing, but more often discordant.

Unlike most rock videos — which cut to the beat and favor flowing, sensual camera moves —

Sonbert's montage is jagged and arrhythmic. His images frequently cut off just as we began to feel drawn in, and often are followed by shots that seem to negate or chide them. By disrupting our conditioned viewing patterns, Sonbert creates an emotional urgency and makes us question the relationship of image and perception, sight and cognition.

There are cheap shots, too — a rectal exam and other surgical footage come out of nowhere — as well as a few visual puns. Sonbert cuts from two swim-suited men wrestling in a park, for example, to the columns of an ancient temple, piercing the air in phallic affirmation.

"Short Fuse" will screen at 7 and 9:30 p.m. with "Friendly Witness." Sonbert will appear at both screenings.

SPECIAL SNEAK PREVIEW
TODAY

"A SHEER DELIGHT!"

— Jeffrey Lyons, SNEAK PREVIEWS

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